

Approved by McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission

December 4, 2014

Approved by Tourism Development Commission

December 16, 2014



**CITY OF SCOTTSDALE  
MCDOWELL SONORAN PRESERVE COMMISSION  
AND  
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
JOINT WORK STUDY SESSION  
APPROVED MINUTES**

**Monday, November 3, 2014**

**Scottsdale Stadium Team Shop  
7408 E. Osborn Road  
Scottsdale, AZ 85251**

**PRESENT:** McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission:

Jim Heitel, Chairman  
Fred Klein, Vice Chairman  
Con Englehorn  
Bob Frost  
Jace McKeighan  
Mike Milillo  
Susan Wheeler

**PRESENT:** Tourism Development Commission:

David Scholefield, Chairperson  
Ace Bailey  
Carl Grupp  
Camille Hill  
Ren Hirose  
Robert McCreary

**ABSENT:** Tom Enders, Vice Chairperson

**STAFF:** Bill Murphy  
Kroy Ekblaw  
Steve Geiogamah  
Paul Katsenes  
Kelly Corsette

**GUESTS:** Rachael Sacco, SCVB  
Rachel Pearson, SCVB  
Mike Nolan, MSC  
Valerie LeBlanc, PLACES Consulting

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Heitel and Chair Scholefield called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Members present as noted above.

**3. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** (Discussion begins at 5:02; approximately 1 minute into the meeting)

Chairman Heitel thanked the Preserve staff for their efforts and for bringing the two commissions together to have a dialogue about the Commissions' mutual interest in making Scottsdale a great community. He mentioned that Rachael Pearson from the Scottsdale Convention and Visitor's Bureau had given the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission (MSPC) a presentation talking about ongoing marketing efforts that highlight the Preserve and the Sonoran Desert. He noted that in addition to the Tourism Development Commission (TDC), the MSPC is open to communicating with other City boards and commissions who share an interest in the Preserve.

Chairman Scholefield commented that the Preserve has a great impact on tourism, because one of the primary reasons people visit Scottsdale is to experience the Sonoran Desert. He said that it is important for the two commissions to have a level of communication about the overlap and what is best for Scottsdale.

**4. MEETING PURPOSE - AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST** (Discussion begins at 5:06; approximately 5 minutes into the meeting)

Mr. Kroy Ekblaw, Preserve Director, said that the intent of the joint meeting is to give the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission and the Tourism Development Commission a chance to get to know each other and to have a dialogue about common interests and shared opportunities.

**5. BACKGROUND OF COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES**  
(Discussion begins at 5:12; approximately 11 minutes into the meeting)

**Tourism – Five-Year Strategic Plan**

Mr. Steve Geigamah, Economic Development Manager, Tourism, discussed the City's tourism development program. Destination marketing is primarily handled through the City's contract with the Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau. The department has a robust research and surveys program through which it is able to gain a better understanding of the demographics of people who are coming to Scottsdale, their

spending habits, and interests as well as insight into those people who do not choose to visit Scottsdale. The Event Funding program uses bed tax dollars to aid in funding of community events, large events, and tourism-related capital projects such as the Tony Nelssen Equestrian Center and the Museum of the West. One key role of the TDC is to provide recommendations to City Council relating to program development and spending of bed tax funds. A key part of the program is the Tourism Development Marketing Strategic Plan.

Valerie LeBlanc from PLACES Consulting provided an overview of the Five-Year Tourism Development Marketing Strategic Plan. She said that research has shown that the next generation of travelers are interested in the outdoor opportunities that are offered in the Preserve, but that they base their travel destination choice on finding a place that offers an urban experience. Focus of the strategic plan is on animating downtown to make the center of the city more lively and interesting to visitors; creating a visitor center that will promote activities in Scottsdale and throughout the state of Arizona in a powerhouse location in downtown Scottsdale; addressing transportation issues, including promoting Scottsdale as a world-class biking destination; promoting the golfing industry; promoting civic participation and "next generation" involvement; and developing a stronger plan for addressing unexpected crises. Ms. LeBlanc stressed the importance of promoting the City's western heritage and in focusing on arts and culture and the art galleries.

Commission members were given the opportunity to make comments.

Ms. LeBlanc noted that one goal of the strategic plan is to enhance the visitor experience by tying the Scottsdale Sonoran Desert to downtown. She stressed that creating an urban experience that is based on market trends while promoting small businesses and creating a unique experience is vital to tourism.

Commissioner Bailey commented that promoting the desert experience in an urban setting offers the opportunity to educate visitors and residents and can entice them to visit the Preserve.

In response to a comment by Commissioner Wheeler, Ms. LeBlanc noted that there is a view corridor to the McDowell Mountains from the interpretation spot on the Marshall Way Bridge.

Chairman Heitel applauded Ms. LeBlanc's efforts to make a connection between the urban environment and the Preserve.

Steve Geiogamah said that the Tourism Marketing Strategic Plan is in its second year of implementation and he briefly reviewed the Tourism Marketing Strategic Plan network which includes the city staff, PLACES Consulting, the Tourism Development Commission, the Tourism Advisory Task Force, City Council, and other City commissions and task forces. Staff and the Task Force welcome any comments and suggestions and everyone is welcomed to attend the next Task Force meeting, scheduled for December 17, 2014.

## **Preserve**

Mr. Ekblaw reviewed activities relating to the Preserve, noting that City Council makes all final decisions relating to land acquisitions and Preserve rules and regulations; the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission advises Council on items such as land acquisition, future improvements, trail access, and Preserve activities; the Preserve Ordinance outlines regulations relating to the protection of the environment and wildlife, educational opportunities, and supporting tourism; the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) provides services to the Preserve; and Preserve staff is the liaison for the MSPC, puts together land acquisitions and improvement programs, and coordinates programs with the MSC. Mr. Ekblaw gave an overview of the land acquisition status and trail and trailhead improvements within the Preserve.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Mr. Ekblaw noted that the opening of trails and trailheads began in the 2006/2007 time frame and usage has risen to over 600,000 this year. The number of visitors is tracked through various methods, including vehicle and limited trail counters. Standardized tracking is being implemented to better manage tracking on the many entrances in the future. Surveys have in the past been conducted with the jeep tours, but there is no historic information on the types of users that frequent the Preserve. Mr. Geiogamah suggested that questions about Preserve usage could be added to the Annual Leisure Visitor Inquiry Study.

### **6. REVIEW OF STRATEGIC AND DAY TO DAY MARKETING GOALS - SCVB/MSC/COS** (Discussion begins at 5:35; approximately 34 minutes into the meeting)

#### **Targeting Interest in the Sonoran Desert**

- **Cooperative activities of SCVB/MSC/COS**

Ms. Rachael Sacco, President and CEO of the Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau discussed the SCVB's philosophy and marketing strategies. She said that destination branding emphasizes that Scottsdale is synonymous with the Sonoran Desert. The Sonoran Desert and the Preserve are emphasized throughout marketing efforts. Ms. Sacco presented images of brand ads and train wraps; marketing materials including print and online publications; and information on social media efforts. The goal of the SCVB efforts is to use imagery to bring visitors the desert in Scottsdale and give them an experience that they will advocate about.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to make comments.

Commissioner Frost mentioned that among other opportunities the Preserve offers bird watching and butterfly count opportunities. He said that the primary marketing focus should be on the Preserve and the Sonoran Desert. Ms. Sacco noted that part of the SCVB's message is that the urban experience can offer the experience of being in the Sonoran Desert.

Vice-Chairman Klein suggested that the marketing efforts use the language "Scottsdale McDowell Sonoran Preserve" instead of the "Sonoran Preserve." He stressed the

importance of ecotourism and suggested that marketing should focus on the fact that Scottsdale has preserved one-third of its land mass and that the Preserve is the biggest municipally run nature preserve in the country.

Commissioner Hirose suggested that it would be beneficial to have Preserve tours of the different trailheads guided by staff members that could be geared towards tourists as well as residents.

Mike Nolan from the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy gave a presentation focusing on new and expanded activities including concierge training; fee-based guided hikes; the Pathfinders program; and creation of a field guide, wildflower guide, and a cultural guide. He noted that the McDowell Sonoran Field Institute will be hosting a single-day symposium that will bring land managers and scientists from around the state for a day of presentations. It is hoped that the program will grow into a multi day event in future years and will eventually grow to include regional and national events. The MSC has been considering several models of ecotourism and feels that the Field Institute would be able to implement within the next few years a program similar to the one the Grand Canyon Field Institute has, where visitors are offered an opportunity to spend several days in the Preserve helping a scientist with scientific work.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to make comments.

Commissioner McKeighan commented that many residents are unaware of the Preserve and if they were given the information they would become walking billboards. Chairman Scholefield suggested that the books produced by the MSC should be made available in gift shops throughout the city and that the City should promote the Preserve at trade shows.

Mr. Nolan noted that the concierge training is focused on hotel concierges at this time. The MSC offers training programs to volunteer stewards and partners with ASU for research programs, but, currently, there is not an accreditation program related to concierge training.

Commissioner Hirose suggested that a presentation about the concierge training program be included at the next SCVB quarterly meeting scheduled for December 2nd. Ms. Rachel Pearson of the SCVB noted that Mike Nolan is on the list of presenters for quarterly meetings and will at some point be brought in to talk about growth in the Preserve.

Valerie LeBlanc noted that part of her year four proposal is to develop a larger approach and invite planners from other areas to come to Scottsdale and learn about the City's environmental sensitivity and thought leadership accomplishments.

Kelly Corsette, City Communications Director, reviewed the City's efforts in partnering with SCVB and MSC in publicizing and promoting the Preserve to the citizens of Scottsdale. He mentioned that the office has issued 11 different press releases related to the Preserve and has produced a video series called "Wings Over the Preserve" intended to encourage citizens to visit the Preserve. The videos are three to eight minutes long and focus on an aerial view of various areas of the Preserve. They are posted on the City's website through a youtube.com link.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to make comments.

Commissioner Hirose suggested that the videos should be given to public relations firms and resorts to use as a marketing tool.

Vice-Chairman Klein asked about starting a monthly online Preserve update. Mr. Corsette said that the idea has been discussed and it was decided that it would be best to work in the content of the newsletter first and include it in the City's weekly update newsletter. Once the content gets to a place where it has outgrown the City's weekly newsletter, consideration can be given to creating a Preserve specific newsletter.

Mr. Corsette reviewed the 2014 Scottsdale Citizen Survey results.

Commissioner Hirose inquired whether there is a social media program that promotes citizens posting of photos taken in the Preserve. Mr. Corsette said that there is some citizen interaction and that the CVB works with social media sites to collect photos from citizens. He said that offering prizes to those who participate in sending in photographs would generate more activity.

**7. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES WITH VARIOUS AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS** (Discussion begins at 6:33; approximately 1 hour and 32 minutes into the meeting)

- **Tribal Partners**
- **Tonto National Forest**
- **County Regional Park**
- **User Groups - Bikes, equestrian, hike, run, tourism, wildlife viewing**
- **Outfitters - Central Booking**

**Open Visioning Discussion on additional collaboration opportunities**

Mr. Ekblaw talked about the number of visitors that visit the Tonto National Forest (TNF) and other County regional parks on an annual basis, the amenities available in these parks, and how the Scottsdale Preserve can benefit from collaboration. The Preserve could benefit from a recreational standpoint as well as opportunities for the Field Institute. It is critical that the City understand the impacts that will come with the estimated 2.6 million increase in population estimated for the Valley by the year 2040. It will be important to understand the recreational opportunities that are available and how not to over use any one activity as the population increases. He discussed existing and future anticipated Preserve improvements and the cost of maintaining and managing those improvements.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Chairman Scholefield asked if the Preserve is nearing capacity. Mr. Ekblaw explained that there is a lot more capacity available in the Preserve. Much of the usage is controlled by the availability of parking and finding a balancing point as to how large to make the parking lots. The goal has been to disperse trailheads and to do studies to determine if more trailheads and parking are desirable.

Commissioner Milillo said that a lot of people do go out to the outer areas because it offers a unique experience and some solitude.

Mr. Ekblaw said that the effects of increased trail usage are part of an ongoing discussion. He noted that untapped environmental and recreational opportunities are available through collaboration with the Tonto National Forest.

Chairman Heitel commented that there is an ongoing discussion about how many trailheads can be provided so that opportunities to experience the Preserve are optimized without overuse. While the longer trails are self-regulating because many people will not undertake a ten-mile hike for example, it is the availability of parking that limits the shorter trails. He noted that it is important to offer multiple experiences.

Mr. Ekblaw noted that on weekends from fall through spring the trailhead parking lots are full, but that during the week it would be reasonable to expect to find solitude within 30 minutes of the trail head. Paul Katsenes added that the user will adjust their visit schedule based on the experience they are looking for.

**8. COMMERCIAL MOTORIZED TOURS** (Discussion begins at 6:52; approximately 1 hour and 51 minutes into the meeting)

- **Review of Council Temporary Approval for 2014/15 Season**
- **Status - Preserve Permits and Tonto National Forest Request for Proposals**
- **Next Steps and Review of Options**
- **Process to consider options by Spring 2015 and recommendation to City Council by May**
  - Follow-up Joint Meeting**
  - Separate Discussions**
  - Joint Study Session with City Council by early 2015**

Mr. Ekblaw discussed the background and history of the motorized tours in the Preserve and reviewed the evolution of the trail routes in the Preserve. He noted that the MSPC and the TDC forwarded recommendations to City Council and subsequently Council approved a transfer of \$30,000 and extended a special permit process for one year. Currently, staff is working with the Tonto National Forest and an RFP is expected to be sent out in December. It is expected that a recommendation will be prepared for Council in the May/June time frame. The possible options include future restricted jeep tour operation in the Preserve only, jeep tour operation in the TNF only, or a combination of trails in the Preserve and the TNF.

Commissioners were given the opportunity to make comments.

Commissioner Hill asked if oversaturation of use in the Tonto National Forest would reduce the experience of jeep tours and whether the use of Federal land can be taken away. Mr. Ekblaw said that the Federal process does allow for them to take away land, but that it is a long process and is not likely to happen. He said that he is not aware of oversaturation in the TNF and noted that they have not offered routes to commercial operators in over ten years.

Commissioner Hill said that the jeep tour operators are passionate about the Sonoran Desert and great spokespersons and caretakers of the Preserve. Commissioner Englehorn noted that the Preserve Ordinance prohibits motorized vehicle operation in the Preserve.

Commissioner Englehorn asked if 1,070 jeep tour users during the season was a significant amount. Ms. Sacco said that it is a low number of users, but that it is important to offer the unique quintessential experience within Scottsdale. Ms. Pearson commented that thousands of visitors are requesting jeep tour rides every day. Many visitors are going to other areas of the state. Ms. Pearson noted that the jeep tour operators have said that they educate their customers on the Sonoran Desert and the Scottsdale Preserve; however, if they are limited to operating in the Tonto National Forest, their presentation will not include information about the Scottsdale Preserve.

Mr. Ekblaw explained that the \$30,000 reserved from bed tax is for the RFP process which is expected to come out in December. Once a proposal has been received from the Tonto National Forest, the Tourism Advisory Commission and the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission will have an opportunity to make recommendations to City Council. Bill Murphy noted that the payment schedule has been divided and only \$10,000 has been expended thus far.

Chairman Scholefield asked what the maximum capacity is for the jeep tour operators. Mr. Ekblaw explained that there was no capacity set because there are only four operators. By the time proposal comes back from TNF, the operators will have their operations information in for the first few months.

Ms. Sacco clarified that the SCVB would like to see the two-and-a-half mile trail maintained in the Preserve for jeep tour operation.

Discussion ensued regarding the terrain of the currently outlined jeep tour trail and the potential for conflict of uses in the future as new trails are developed. Mr. Ekblaw noted that a few jeep tour trails will be maintained for emergency access to remote areas.

It was the consensus of both commissions to schedule another joint meeting to further discuss the commercial motorized tour recommendation in February or March once the report is received.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
A/V Tronics, Inc. DBA AVTranz.